

## Effectiveness and Implications: Impact on Arab and Muslim Australians

- 3.1 This chapter discusses the impact of the new security environment on Arab and Muslim Australians as part of a wider assessment of the operation, effectiveness and implications of anti-terrorism laws.
- 3.2 Laws, policies and practices which disproportionately impact on minorities risk undermining the principle of equality, which is the cornerstone of democracy and essential to the maintenance of community cohesion. The principle applies to all arms of government and should provide an ethical guide to public debate on these otherwise potentially divisive issues. The Sheller Committee quoted Justice Latham in this regard:

[I]t was easy for judges of constitutional courts to accord basic rights to popular minorities and individuals. The real test came when they were asked to accord the same rights to unpopular minorities and individuals.<sup>1</sup>

### **General rise in prejudicial attitudes**

- 3.3 One of the damaging consequences of the terrorist bombing attacks in the US, the UK, Europe and Indonesia, has been a rise in prejudicial

---

1 Sheller Report, p. 41.

feelings toward Arab and Muslim Australia.<sup>2</sup> The same problem has emerged in other western countries and requires careful consideration and a thoughtful response.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.4 Australia, the United States, Britain and many of the European countries are the birth place and chosen home of millions of people of the Muslim faith. Muslims in Australia are ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse, with more than 36 percent of the 281,500 Muslims in Australia having been born in Australia.<sup>4</sup> There is no single homogenous Muslim community in Australia or single interpretation of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

## Fear and alienation

- 3.5 Over the past five years Islamic and other community based organisations have consistently raised their concerns about a rise in generalised fear and uncertainty within the Arab and Muslim Australian communities. During this review, it was reiterated that anti-terrorism laws impact most on Arab and Muslim Australians who feel under greater surveillance and suspicion. The Committee is especially concerned by reports of increased alienation attributed to new anti terrorist measures, which are seen as targeting Muslims and contributing to a climate of suspicion. The Sheller Committee said there is:

...a substantial increase in fear, a growing sense of alienation from the wider community and an increase in distrust of authority.<sup>6</sup>

- 
- 2 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *IsmaU – Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians*, 2004, p.3. Available at: [http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA\\_complete.pdf](http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA_complete.pdf)
- 3 European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, *The Impact of & July 2005 London Bomb Attacks on Muslim Communities in the EU*, November 2005; Institute of Race Relations, *Arrests under anti terrorism legislation since 11 September 2001*, 2004. Available at: [http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/terror\\_arrests\\_study.pdf](http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/terror_arrests_study.pdf)
- 4 Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Muslims in Australia – a snapshot* (data taken from the 2001 census). Available at: [www.immi.gov.au/living-in-Australia/a-diverse-australia/communities/MCRG/Muslims-in-Australia-snapshot.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-Australia/a-diverse-australia/communities/MCRG/Muslims-in-Australia-snapshot.pdf). More recently, in an address to the Conference of Australian Imams on 16 September 2006, the Immigration Minister's Parliamentary Secretary stated that Australia's Muslim population is now 360,000.
- 5 Richard Kerbaj, Prophet not perfect, say Islamic scholar, *The Australian*, 4 October 2006 available at [www.theAustralian.news.com.au](http://www.theAustralian.news.com.au).
- 6 Sheller Report p. 142.

- 3.6 In 2005, the Committee identified this trend in the review of ASIO's special questioning and detention powers under Division 3 Part III of the ASIO Act. During that review it was evident that the Muslim community believed that the expanded intelligence gathering powers were principally aimed at Muslims.<sup>7</sup> In the current context, the Committee was told that much of the concern and confusion was grounded in the wide definition of terrorism and terrorist organisations, and the related offences that criminalise possession of things, and support, training, membership, and association with a terrorist organisation. Uncertainty about the scope of the law was said to be affecting the normal dynamics of the community.
- 3.7 An important function of the criminal law is to express society's moral opprobrium about certain conduct and to have a symbolic and deterrent effect. In hearings, AGD explained that:
- It is a deliberate policy of the offences to change behaviour where people are dealing with terrorist organisations. When they are dealing with terrorist organisations that is something they need to be very cautious about.<sup>8</sup>
- 3.8 It is not the intention of the Parliament that anti-terrorism laws should have a negative impact on the integrity of normal life of Arab and Muslim Australians or any other sector of Australian society. It is central to Australian democratic values that people are free to practice their religious beliefs in community with one another. A healthy and robust civil society promotes both social interaction and political participation. The voluntary involvement in faith based, social and welfare organisations, and the participation of young people in group activities are all aspects of the Australian way of life that promote social inclusion and personal development.

## Discrimination and selectivity

- 3.9 AMCRAN stated that:

The first concern people have is that the laws are selectively applied to Muslims. In a survey we conducted of 150 members of the Muslim community at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006... we found that approximately two thirds of the respondents felt that the Muslim community was

---

7 See Chapter 4 of Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD, *ASIO's Questioning and Detention Powers*, Commonwealth of Australia November, 2005.

8 AGD, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p.2.

targeted. These perceptions, although they are perceptions, have some basis in fact.<sup>9</sup>

- 3.10 The fact that only Muslim organisations had been listed as terrorist organisations under the *Criminal Code*, triggering related terrorist organisation offences, was a source of criticism. Consequently, the crime of association is regarded as only applying to Muslims.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.11 The restriction on disclosure of security sensitive evidence as compared to the high profile media coverage of raids and arrests was cited as increasing perceptions of unfairness. Official statements and media coverage of Operation Pendennis was said to demonstrate a ‘disproportionate bias against Muslims’, when contrasted to the public statements about the John Howard Amundsen case.<sup>11</sup> The new AA prisoner classification system, which applies to people remanded or convicted of terrorism related crimes, was also criticised as excessively harsh. Concern was also raised that defendants in terrorism cases are less likely to get bail. It was argued therefore that steps should be taken to reduce the period of time on remand and get cases quickly to trial.
- 3.12 These policies and practices were seen as interfering with the presumption of innocence, and the right to fair trial and to humane treatment. They were said to feed perceptions that Muslims will be subject to differential standards. More recently, differential attitudes toward Australians who wanted to defend Lebanon or supported the right of Hezbollah or the Palestinians to defend themselves compared to Australians who supported Israel and participated in the Israeli armed forces, were said to illustrate a wider problem of systemic bias.<sup>12</sup>

## Confusion and uncertainty

- 3.13 As noted above, the breadth of offences and uncertainty about the definition of terrorism and terrorist organisation and related offences were said to have caused confusion and exacerbated fear and alienation. It was common ground that some of the perceptions about

---

9 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p.51.

10 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 51.

11 Islamic Information and Support Centre of Australia, *Submission 13*, p. 6.

12 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, pp. 54 and 62; Cynthia Banham, *Don't take up arms with the enemy*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 2006, p.15.

the laws are based on incorrect information.<sup>13</sup> However, the Committee was told that this was not simply a question of access to information, the complexity and breadth of offences made it more difficult for people to know with certainty whether they had committed an offence. As the Islamic Information and Support Centre of Australia (IISCA) explained:

Most people know that what they are doing is either right or wrong. With this...anti-terrorism legislation...we do not know what, how or when these laws can apply to an individual, or organisation or a group.<sup>14</sup>

- 3.14 The frequency of legislative amendments had also made dissemination more difficult and reinforced the view that legislation would be changed in response to particular circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, witnesses said that the law had led people to change their behaviour and there was a widespread perception among Muslims that the laws limited the free exercise of speech, expression and religious beliefs and worked against community participation.

## Alienation and withdrawal

- 3.15 AMCRAN explained that the impact of the anti-terrorism measures was being felt in various ways:

Firstly, people self-limit their behaviour. In other words, they overestimate the reach of the laws and they are unnecessarily cautious. For example, we have seen people not wanting to go to normal Islamic classes, or similar things, because they fear that ASIO may be watching. We have heard people telling their children not to go to protests because they would be just exposing themselves once again.<sup>16</sup>

- 3.16 IISCA expressed the same concerns. For example, it was said that parents restricted their children's participation in the mosque and youth activities because of the fear of attracting the interest of ASIO. Even attending information sessions about anti-terrorism laws had been avoided because it might be interpreted as demonstrating an

---

13 See generally, IISCA, *Submission 13*; AMCRAN, *Submission 5*; IISCA, *Transcript*, 31 July 2006 p.45; AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 51-52; AGD, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 2.

14 IISCA, *Transcript*, 31 July, p.45.

15 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August, p.51.

16 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 52.

interest in terrorism.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the general criminal law, it was said that this self-limiting behaviour was to avoid the risk of questioning by ASIO, and, in particular, the risk of prosecution and imprisonment for discussion of operational information (arrest, location, questions etc) related to an ASIO questioning warrant.<sup>18</sup>

3.17 The pervasiveness of the problem is partly related to the informal way Muslim communities function. IISCA told the Committee that, the mosque plays a central role in daily life of practising Muslim and there is little distinction between religious bodies and social and welfare associations. People will not necessarily know much about the people they associate with in this context and formal notions of association or membership have little relevance and are difficult to define. Moreover, it is a religious duty to give Zakat<sup>19</sup> anonymously through the mosque or community organisation for welfare purposes in Australia and overseas.<sup>20</sup> This has raised concern that a person may be accused of financing terrorism if a recipient is later accused of having some connection with terrorist activity however remote. Efforts within the community to counteract these concerns appear to have had limited impact.

3.18 AMCRAN reported that the complexity of the law was inhibiting contributions to welfare assistance for Muslims in Lebanon and Palestine:

I will give another example of the current complexity – and this is only one example. People are talking to us about wishing to make donations to help people whom they see as their brothers and sisters in Palestine and Lebanon. And we have to tell them that it is very difficult to give advice on that because there are difficulties to do with a government in Palestine, one wing of which is on the proscribed list of terrorist organisations.<sup>21</sup>

3.19 Dr Kadous said, based on his personal experience outside of AMCRAN, that

---

17 IISCA, *Submission 13*, p.3.

18 IISCA, *Supplementary Submission 25*, p.4

19 Zakat is 2.5% annual surplus wealth.

20 IISCA, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

21 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 52.

... donations to worthwhile charities ... have been dropping.  
And that is very unfortunate.<sup>22</sup>

- 3.20 Although this evidence is anecdotal, it is consistent with the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) study and the representations made to the Parliament over a number of years.<sup>23</sup>

## HREOC: the *IsmaU* project

- 3.21 In 2003, HREOC interviewed 1423 people in 69 consultations in all states and territories and distributed 1475 questionnaires in New South Wales and Victoria. The *IsmaU* project found a widespread perception that the Muslim community has been unfairly targeted and that there was an increase in various forms of prejudice because of race or religion. These incidents ranged from offensive remarks on the bus to physical violence and high rates of reporting to the survey of innocuous events.

- 3.22 The *IsmaU* project found that the problem is worse for people who appear to be readily identifiable as Muslim. Muslim women, who wear traditional Islamic dress (*hijab*), were found to be 'especially afraid of being abused or attacked'. It is also concerning that:

Arab and Muslim youth felt that they were particularly at risk of harassment which has led to feelings of frustration, alienation and a loss of confidence in themselves and trust in authority.<sup>24</sup>

- 3.23 Overall the study identified three main trends within the Muslim communities:

- an increase in fear and insecurity;
- the alienation of some members of that community; and

---

22 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 52.

23 See Chapter 4 *Implications for the Muslim Community*, in Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD, *ASIO's Questioning and Detention Powers: Review of the operation, effectiveness and implications of Division 3 of Part III in the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979*, November, Canberra 2005.

24 HREOC, *IsmaU - Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians*, 2004, p.3. Available at: [http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA\\_complete.pdf](http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA_complete.pdf)

- a growing distrust of authority.<sup>25</sup>

3.24 The report's findings are consistent with the experience of organisations like AMCRAN and IISCA<sup>26</sup> For example, it was reported that prejudice manifested in a range of ways, from hostile remarks on the street and at school to more serious incidents. The Committee was told that religious or racially motivated crimes were not always reported to the police because people felt that the police were unsympathetic.<sup>27</sup> In response to a question on notice HREOC confirmed that:

The IsmaU Report found that most incidents of discrimination raised in the consultations were not reported to police or other government authorities due to fear of victimisation; lack of evidence and a general lack of trust in authority; lack of knowledge about the law and complaints processes; the perceived difficulty in making a complaint and the perception that outcomes were unsatisfactory.<sup>28</sup>

3.25 It is difficult for the Committee to assess accurately the extent of the problem. Whether it peaks in response to specific incidents, which create a temporary backlash or is a deeper more pervasive and entrenched problem.

## Media commentary

3.26 The role of the media is critical in how a society responds to challenges and threats. The volume of media interest in Muslims has grown significantly and is a new experience for many faith based organisations. While most journalists try to ensure balanced reporting, Muslim groups told the Committee that biased media reporting and alleged incidents of vilification on radio were promoting prejudicial attitudes toward Arab and Muslim Australians.

3.27 Witnesses outlined the genuine distress experienced by many people across the community and their concern that the heated public debate

---

25 See HREOC, *IsmaU* – Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians, 2004. Available at: [http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA\\_complete.pdf](http://hreoc.gov.au/racial-discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA_complete.pdf) Accessed 12 September 2006.

26 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August, 2006, p.51.

27 IISCA, *Submission 13*, p.12.

28 HREOC, *Supplementary Submission 22*, p. 1.



and excessive focus on ordinary Muslims were damaging community relations. Public debate about the wearing of the hijab and Sharia law were cited as recent examples, which unnecessarily inflamed community feeling.<sup>29</sup>

- 3.28 As noted earlier, the result of Operation Pendennis, which led to the arrest of eighteen young men in Melbourne and Sydney, was announced by senior officials and attracted extensive media coverage. The Committee was told that the way the public disclosure was handled had increased the sense of alienation, especially among many Muslim youth.
- 3.29 The language used in submissions to describe the impact of the anti-terrorism measures was strong and reflected the level of distress in the community: 'an overwhelming sense of fear', 'a general lack of confidence in the decision making process', 'severe financial penalties suffocate individual opinion', some campaigns were 'ignorant' and implementation of the laws was often seen as 'duplicitous and hypocritical'.<sup>30</sup>
- 3.30 IISCA listed some examples of what they saw as official bias and sensational reporting. These included:

New South Wales police chief Ken Moroney said a 'potentially catastrophic attack' had been averted. I am satisfied that we have disrupted what I would regard as the final stages of a terrorist attack or the launch of a terrorist attack in Australia.

Victoria's Police Commissioner, Christine Nixon, agrees that police have prevented a major terrorist attack from occurring. 'We believe that they were planning an operation,' she said, 'We weren't exactly sure when nor, more importantly, what they planned to damage or do harm to.'

A recent example of this was the books of hate campaign championed by the media. The campaign was levelled

---

29 For example, Get out if you want Sharia law, Australia tells Muslims, *The Daily Times*, 26 August 2005; AAP, Accept our Law or Leave: Costello, 10 November 2006; AAP, If you want sharia law, move: Costello, [www.theage.com.au/news/Nation...670199148.html](http://www.theage.com.au/news/Nation...670199148.html), 23 February 2006; Yusra Khreegi, No hijab ban in Australia just now - but if you Sharia, "get out", [www.iwitness.co.uk/foreign/0905f-09.htm](http://www.iwitness.co.uk/foreign/0905f-09.htm), 24 September 2005; Tim Martin, Efforts to Ban Muslim Attire Blasted, *The Mercury*, 30 August, 2005; AAP, Bishop backs ban on Muslim headscarves, 28 August 2005; AAP, Bishop accused of keeping bomb in skirt, 6 September 2005; AAP, Danna Vale defends Muslim comments, 16 February, 2006.

30 IISCA, *Submission 13*, pp.4-5 and AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August, 2006, p.56 and 62.

against Muslim bookshops who were accused of inciting hatred by selling particular texts albeit these same texts were available in public libraries, at universities and other bookshops around Australia.

The regular commentary from John Laws, Alan Jones and Steve Price in Sydney are examples of talk back hosts who seemingly incite open hatred towards Muslims, their beliefs and culture. All too often they incite the hatred of their audience 'egging them on and then encouraging callers to make derogatory statements about Muslims.' ... An example of this was during the Cronulla riots, when untruths about the circumstances surrounding the events were deliberately manipulated into a story of Us versus Them.

[I]n 2005 senior members of the government started the 'if you don't like it get out campaign'. This campaign was aimed exclusively at Muslims of all ages, even Muslim primary school children were not immune to the constant barrage of insults and ridicule.<sup>31</sup>

3.31 The Committee has not conducted a survey of media coverage and notes that there has been little comprehensive empirical research on this subject.<sup>32</sup> However, we are concerned about the increased attention focused on the Muslim community and the lack of balance and rationality in some reporting. Freedom of speech carries with it a responsibility not to promote hostility and prejudicial attitudes. It was suggested that the Commonwealth should consider laws to prohibit incitement of racial and religious hatred however, the Committee considered this to be outside the terms of reference.<sup>33</sup>

3.32 In 2005, the Committee said that:

...there is also a broad community responsibility to discourage inflammatory attacks which undermine community values of tolerance and freedom. Muslims too are being affected by intolerant and inflammatory opinions which are being aired on talkback radio and such opinions create community conflict, give licence to verbal and physical attacks on Muslim people and alienate Muslim youth from

---

31 IISCA, *Submission 13*, pp. 6-13.

32 Dr Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dr Bianca Smith, *The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media (The Age and Herald Sun Newspapers)*, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, November 2005.

33 IISCA, *Supplementary Submission 25*, p.1.

mainstream Australia.<sup>34</sup>

### Recommendation 3

**The Committee recommends that Australian police forces review their media policies to ensure that official statements do not prejudice the right to fair trial and are sensitive to the wider implications for the community.**

## Education and consultation

- 3.33 The Sheller Committee recommended that the Government increase its community education efforts, especially in the Arab and Muslim communities.
- 3.34 It was apparent that there is little 'plain English' material available that would assist the situation. The efforts AMCRAN are notable in this regard. AMCRAN has published clear and accurate information about the new laws.<sup>35</sup> They printed 4000 copies of the first edition of their booklet, the second edition was released in October and the website gets 'about 100 hits a week'. However, AMCRAN said that the extensive legislative program has made keeping information up to date difficult.<sup>36</sup>
- 3.35 AGD has attended several conferences and community based forums, which have provided an opportunity to explain the anti-terrorism laws. In response to a question on notice, AGD advised that:

Departmental officers are invited to speak at about the Australian Government's counter-terrorism legislation.

Departmental officers spoke at the following forums:

27 February 2006 - Departmental staff briefed the Muslim Community Reference Group on the new counter-terrorism laws;

---

34 Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO ASIS and DSD, *ASIO's Questioning and Detention Powers: Review of the operation, effectiveness and implications of Division 3 Part III of the ASIO Act 1979*, tabled November 2005, p. 79.

35 *Anti-terrorism Laws: ASIO, the Police and You* booklet available at: [http://www.amcran.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogsection&id=3&Itemid=27](http://www.amcran.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=3&Itemid=27)

36 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 54.

19 April – Departmental staff participated in a legislation and policy forum held at Monash University to discuss the counter-terrorism legislation;

19 and 20 May 2006 – Departmental staff provided a presentation on the Government’s counter-terrorism legislation at a forum hosted by the Citizens for Democracy in Armidale.

28 May 2006 – Departmental staff provided a presentation on the Government’s counter-terrorism legislation to a forum hosted by the Young Lawyers Association in Sydney;

2 June 2006 – Departmental staff addressed the Attorney-General’s Non-Government Organisation Forum on Human Rights; and

19 July 2006, Departmental staff provided a presentation on the implications of Australia’s new terrorism laws on specific ethnic communities at a conference of The Northern Migrant Resource Centre Inc. in Melbourne.<sup>37</sup>

3.36 While all these efforts are important, the majority of these meetings appear to have been ad hoc ‘as the opportunity arises’.<sup>38</sup> Except for the specific briefing of the Muslim Reference Group (MRG) the events above are not targeted toward Muslim communities or Muslim organisations. It was suggested that Muslims need more education about their rights and this was best achieved by delivering that information through schools and mosques, and other places frequented by the Muslim communities.<sup>39</sup> There was no discussion about who was best placed to deliver that information, but the Committee considers that it would be important that information be comprehensive and neutral.

3.37 AGD has also produced pamphlets that give answers to basic questions about the ATA No.2. The Committee was advised that:

In January 2006, the Department arranged for 4500 copies of the pamphlet to be printed. This number included 1000 pamphlets printed in English, 500 printed in French, 500 in Vietnamese, 500 in Traditional Chinese, 500 in Spanish, 500 in Arabic, 500 in Bahasa Malay and 500 in Turkish. In addition,

---

37 AGD *Supplementary Submission*, p. 4

38 AGD, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 9.

39 IISCA, *Supplementary Submission 25*, p.1.

in July 2006 the Department ordered a further 4400 copies of the pamphlet to be printed.<sup>40</sup>

- 3.38 The pamphlets are set out in simple terms and deal with preventative detention and control orders. While all efforts to explain the laws are worthwhile, what has occurred so far is too limited to make an impact and does not appear to be part of a comprehensive communication strategy, which addresses the new anti-terrorism laws in their totality. A more detailed publication on the legislative regime, greater use of the departmental website and face to face community level forums would increase AGD's effectiveness. Consideration should also be given to publishing material in Urdu, which appears to be missing from the list of community language.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Committee recommends that AGD increase its effort to ensure that comprehensive information about the terrorism law regime is available to the public in appropriate community languages.**

### **The Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG)**

- 3.39 The most valuable initiative to date is the Muslim Community Reference Group. The Prime Minister established the Muslim Community Reference Group in mid-September 2005 under the umbrella of the COAG to act as an advisory group to Government. The Group is made up of senior members of the Muslim community and representatives of Muslim community organisations. Seven sub-groups have been established to target areas of concern including youth, women, schooling, education and training of clerical and lay leaders, employment outcomes and workplace issues, crisis management, and family and community.<sup>41</sup>
- 3.40 Witnesses told the Committee:

One of our objections to the process of the creation of the Muslim Community Reference Group was that it was not

---

40 AGD, Response to Question on Notice, *Supplementary Submission 19*, p.4.

41 DIMA, *Security Legislation Review (SLR) Submission 34*, p.5.

open and transparent – nor was it representative. ... My understanding of the process was that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs suggested a list to the Prime Minister, who then looked at the list in consultation with the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, John Cobb, and they collectively came up with a list. ... Since [it has been] formed there have not been many instances where they have gone back and consulted their communities [with the exception of the Islamic Council of Victoria] [and] there has not been much in the way of promulgation of information about what is happening in those forums.<sup>42</sup>

3.41 AMCRAN expressed some concern about ‘some of the more complex decisions that are deeply troubling to the Muslim Community – for example the training of imams, which brings with it, at least to some Muslim eyes, a concern about government interference in the practice of religion.’<sup>43</sup>

3.42 Nevertheless, the creation of MCRG is an important acknowledgement of the need to communicate directly with the Muslim community. The MCRG has had input into the National Action Plan<sup>44</sup> being developed by the Government combat intolerance and extremism and is part of the wide social cohesion program. The initiatives include:

- Programmes, including pilots in some disadvantaged suburbs, including some Muslim communities, involving:
  - ⇒ A new values based education initiative;
  - ⇒ Employment coordinators;
  - ⇒ Employment workshop for young job seekers;
  - ⇒ A sporting programme to increase participation of children in local sporting clubs;
  - ⇒ A mentoring programme to increase participation of young people in work, education, training and community life.

---

42 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 60.

43 AMCRAN, *Transcript*, 1 August 2006, p. 60.

44 It should be noted that this plan is directed at the whole community not only at the Muslim community. The first two pilots are in Lakemba and Macquarie Fields. Address to the Muslim Community Reference Group by Andrew Robb, Wednesday 2 August 2006, [www.andrewrobb.com.au/news](http://www.andrewrobb.com.au/news)

- The creation of a world class centre of research and educational excellence in Islamic studies within a major Australian university, to play a leadership role in exploring the place of Islam in modern society;
- Interfaith dialogue projects;
- Continuation of the Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG);
- A volunteer staffed counselling and support helpline for the Muslim community;
- Specialist training, educational materials and forums to bring law enforcement agencies and Muslim communities together to resolve issues; and crisis management training to help empower the Muslim community to plan for and respond to issues, incidents and crises.<sup>45</sup>

3.43 The Government has committed \$8 billion for its overall counter terrorism strategy. A commitment of \$35 million over four years has been made to support National Action Plan initiatives.<sup>46</sup> This list of initiatives is long and further funding and resources may be necessary if the Plan is to achieve its objectives.

## Conclusion

3.44 The Committee endorses the Sheller Committee's findings about the impact of counter terrorism laws on Arab and Muslim Australians:

The SLRC also has serious concerns about the way in which the legislation is perceived by some members of the Muslim and Arab communities. ... Misunderstandings and fearfulness will have a continuing and significant impact and tend to undermine the aims of the security legislation. The negative effects upon minority communities, and in particular the escalating radicalisation of young members of such communities, have the potential to cause long term damage to the Australian community. It is vital to remember that

---

45 Address to the Muslim Community Reference Group by Andrew Robb, Wednesday 2 August 2006, [www.andrewrobb.com.au/news](http://www.andrewrobb.com.au/news)

46 Address to the Muslim Community Reference Group by Andrew Robb, Wednesday 2 August 2006, [www.andrewrobb.com.au/news](http://www.andrewrobb.com.au/news)

lessening the prospects of 'homegrown' terrorism is an essential part of an anti-terrorism strategy.<sup>47</sup>

- 3.45 Measures to promote social inclusiveness are an important part of the strategy to combat intolerance and extremism and to deal with the conditions that contribute to the spread of terrorist violence.

---

### **Recommendation 5**

**The Committee recommends that Australia's counter terrorism strategy encompass:**

- **a commitment to the rights of Muslims to live free from harassment and enjoy the same rights extended to all religious groups in Australia;**
- **wide dissemination of information about mechanisms for complaint or redress in relation to law enforcement, intelligence agencies and the media; and**
- **a statement on the importance of informed and balanced reporting to promote social cohesion.**

---

47 *Report of the Security Legislation Review Committee*, June 2006, p. 142.